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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Russia pulls out of Kharkiv, batters east

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russian troops are withdrawing from around Ukraine's second-largest city after bombarding it for weeks, the Ukrainian military said Saturday, as Kyiv and Moscow's forces engaged in a grinding battle for the country's eastern industrial heartland.

Ukraine's general staff said the Russians were pulling back from the northeastern city of Kharkiv and focusing on guarding supply routes, while launching mortar, artillery and airstrikes in the eastern Donetsk province in order to "deplete Ukrainian forces and destroy fortifications."

Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov said Ukraine was "entering a new — long-term — phase of the war."

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Ukrainians were doing their "maximum" to drive out the invaders and that the outcome of the war would depend on support from Europe and other allies.

"No one today can predict how long this war will last," Zelenskyy said in his nightly video address late Friday.

In a show of support, a U.S. Senate delegation led by Republican leader Mitch McConnell met with the Ukrainian president Saturday in Kyiv. A video posted on Ze-

lenskyy's Telegram account showed McConnell, who represents the state of Kentucky, and fellow Republican senators Susan Collins of Maine, John Barrasso of Wyoming and John Cornyn of Texas greeting him.

Their trip came after Kentucky's other senator, Rand Paul, blocked until this week the Senate's approval of an additional \$40 billion to help Ukraine and its allies withstand Russia's three-month-old invasion.

After Russian forces failed to capture Kyiv following the Feb. 24 invasion, President Vladimir Putin shifted his focus eastward to the Donbas, an industrial region where Ukrainian troops have battled Moscow-backed separatists since 2014.

Russia's offensive aims to encircle Ukraine's most experienced and best-equipped troops, who are based in the east, and to seize parts of the Donbas that remain in Ukraine's control.

Airstrikes and artillery barrages make it extremely dangerous for reporters to move around in the east, hindering efforts to get a full picture of the direction the fighting is taking. But the battle appears to be a back-and-forth slog with no major breakthroughs on either side.

Russia has captured some Donbas villag-

es and towns, including Rubizhne, a city with a prewar population of around 55,000.

Zelenskyy said Ukraine's forces have also made progress in the east, retaking six Ukrainian towns or villages in the past day.

Kharkiv, which is not far from the Russian border and only 50 miles southwest of the Russian city of Belgorod, has undergone weeks of intense shelling. The largely Russian-speaking city with a prewar population of 1.4 million was a key Russian military objective earlier in the war, when Moscow hoped to capture and hold major Ukrainian cities.

Ukraine "appears to have won the Battle of Kharkiv" the Institute for the Study of War, a Washington-based think tank, said. "Ukrainian forces prevented Russian troops from encircling, let alone seizing Kharkiv, and then expelled them from around the city, as they did to Russian forces attempting to seize Kyiv."

Regional governor Oleh Sinegubov said in a post on the Telegram messaging app that there had been no shelling attacks on Kharkiv in the past day.

He added that Ukraine had launched a counteroffensive near Izyum, a city 78 miles south of Kharkiv which was held by Russia since at least the beginning of April.

USAF cadets who refused vaccine may not graduate

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Four cadets at the Air Force Academy may not graduate or be commissioned as military officers this month because they have refused the COVID-19 vaccine, and they may be required to pay back thousands of dollars in tuition costs, according to Air Force officials.

It's the only military academy, so far, where cadets may face such penalties. The Army and Navy said that as of now, none of their seniors are being prevented from graduating at the U.S. Military Academy at

West Point, N.Y., or the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Md., due to vaccine refusals. The graduations are in about two weeks.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin last year made the COVID-19 vaccinations mandatory for service members, including those at the military academies, saying the vaccine is critical to maintaining military readiness and the health of the force.

Military leaders have argued that troops for decades have been required to get as many as 17 vaccines in order to maintain the health of the force, particularly those deploying overseas.

Students arriving at the military academies get a regimen of shots on their first day — such as measles, mumps and Rubella — if they aren't already vaccinated. And they routinely get regular flu shots in the fall.

Members of Congress, the military and the public have questioned if the exemption reviews by the military services have been fair. And there have been multiple lawsuits filed against the mandate, mainly centering on the fact that very few service members have been granted religious exemptions from the shots.

Lt. Col. Brian Maguire, Air Force Academy spokesman said that while vaccination status may hinder the four seniors' graduation, "there are still two weeks until graduation, so their status could change as the cadets weigh their options."

According to Maguire, the four cadets — who are not named — have been informed of the potential consequences, and have met with the academy's superintendent. In addition to those four, there are two juniors, one sophomore and six freshmen at the academy who have also refused the vaccine.

US, Russian defense chiefs finally talk

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Russian Minister of Defense Sergei Shoigu spoke with U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin on Friday after months of refusing direct contact with his American counterpart. But officials said the call didn't appear to signal any change in Moscow's war in Ukraine.

A senior Defense Depart-

ment official said Friday that while Austin believes the hour-long conversation was important in the effort to keep lines of communication open, it didn't resolve any "acute issues" or lead to any change in what the Russian are doing or saying as the war enters week 12.

The call — initiated by Austin — marked the highest level

American contact with a Russian official since the war began in late February. Over the past several months, Pentagon officials have repeatedly said that Russian leaders declined to take calls from Austin and Army Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

This is the first conversation between Austin and Shoigu since Feb. 18, a week before

the war started. Another senior official said Friday that Milley is expected to also reach out to his counterpart, Gen. Valery Gerasimov, Russian chief of the general staff.

In a statement, the Pentagon said that Austin "urged an immediate ceasefire in Ukraine and emphasized the importance of maintaining lines of communication."

Putin warns Finland over NATO application

Associated Press

HELSINKI — Russian President Vladimir Putin warned his Finnish counterpart Saturday relations between the two neighbors could be "negatively affected" if Finland follows through with plans to apply for NATO membership.

The Kremlin's press service said in a statement that Putin told Sauli Niinisto that Finland's abandonment "of its traditional policy of military neutrality would be an error since there

are no threats to Finland's security."

"Such a change in the country's foreign policy could negatively affect Russian-Finnish relations, which had been built in the spirit of good neighborliness and partnership for many years, and were mutually beneficial," the statement added.

The response came after Niinisto told Putin in a phone conversation that the militarily non-aligned Nordic country that has a complex history with its huge

eastern neighbor "will decide to apply for NATO membership in the coming days."

Niinisto's office said in a statement that the Finnish head of state told Putin how starkly Finland's security environment had changed after Moscow's Feb. 24 invasion on Ukraine, and pointed to Russia's demands on Finland refraining from seeking membership to the 30 member-state Western military alliance.

Niinisto, Finland's president since 2012 and one of a handful

of Western leaders who has been in regular dialogue with Putin over the past decade, pointed out that he had already told Putin at their first meeting in 2012 that "each independent nation would maximize its own security."

Niinisto stressed that Finland, despite its likely future membership in NATO, wants to continue to deal with Russia bilaterally in "practical issues generated by the border neighborhood" and hopes to engage with Moscow "in a professional manner."

About 10,700 soldiers to replace troops in Europe

By CAITLIN DOORBOS

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — About 10,700 troops now in the United States will rotate into Europe in the coming months to relieve other service members deployed there, chief Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said Friday.

"These deployments are one-for-one unit replacements, which will leave our overall force posture in the region — approximately 100,000 [troops] — unchanged," Kirby told reporters at the Pentagon.

About 4,200 soldiers will come from the 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team of the 1st Cavalry Division at Fort Hood, Texas, and replace the same number of soldiers with 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team of

the 3rd Infantry Division now in Germany, he said.

Another 4,200 from the 2nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team of the 101st Airborne Division at Fort Campbell, Ky., will deploy to replace the 3rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team of the 82nd Airborne Division in Poland, Kirby said.

Roughly 500 from the 101st Airborne Division Headquarters also at Fort Campbell will replace soldiers from the 82nd Airborne stationed throughout other areas of Eastern Europe, he said.

"The units being replaced will return to their home station following an appropriate turnover of responsibilities," Kirby said.

Those 8,900 troops had been deployed to Europe since early this year as Russian

President Vladimir Putin amassed his forces and eventually invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24.

The remaining 1,800 soldiers will come from the 1st Armored Division's Combat Aviation Brigade at Fort Bliss, Texas, to relieve the 1st Air Cavalry Brigade in the region as part of Atlantic Resolve, a Defense Department rotational effort that began after Russia's last invasion of Ukraine in 2014, Kirby said.

The first replacements will deploy in the "coming weeks" and continue into the first months of summer, according to Kirby.

The U.S. has had troops deployed to Eastern Europe to support NATO countries near Ukraine, where Russia now enters its 12th week of war.

20 people injured in Milwaukee shootings

Associated Press

MILWAUKEE — Twenty people were injured in two shootings in downtown Milwaukee near an entertainment district where thousands had been watching the Bucks lose to the Celtics in Game 6 of the NBA's Eastern Conference semifinals, authorities said.

None of the injuries from either shooting after Friday night's game were believed to be life-threatening.

The first shooting, involving three victims, occurred adjacent to the Deer District — an entertainment district with numerous bars and restaurants where large crowds often assemble to watch major sporting events.

The Milwaukee Fire Department said authorities took two people to a hospital, a 30-year-old man and a 16-year-old girl, and a third person drove to a hospital. Police said a 29-year-old man was in custody.

Seventeen more people were injured in a second shooting about two hours later, which happened a few blocks away. Ten people were taken into custody and nine guns were recovered, WTMJ-TV reported.

There was no immediate indication whether the two shootings were related or involved fans who were watching the game.

Witnesses told WTMJ-TV that they saw a fight outside a bar following the basketball game.

Amid flames, nuclear lab peers into future of wildfire

Associated Press

LOS ALAMOS, N.M. — Public schools were closed and evacuation bags packed this week as a stubborn wildfire crept within a few miles of the city of Los Alamos and its companion U.S. national security lab — where assessing apocalyptic threats is a specialty and wildland fire is a beguiling equation.

Lighter winds on Friday allowed for the most intense aerial attack this week on those flames west of Santa Fe as well as the biggest U.S. wildfire burning farther east, south of Taos.

"We had all kinds of aviation flying today," fire operations chief Todd Abel said at a Santa Fe National Forest briefing Friday evening. "We haven't had that opportunity in a long time."

In Southern California, where a fire has destroyed at least 20 homes south of Los Angeles in the coastal community of Laguna Niguel, Orange County emergency officials scaled back the mandatory evacuation area Friday from 900 residences to 131.

People who remained on alert to prepare

for evacuations west of Santa Fe included scientists at Los Alamos National Laboratory who are tapping supercomputers to peer into the future of wildfires in the U.S. West, where climate change and an enduring drought are fanning the frequency and intensity of forest and grassland fire.

The research and partnerships eventually could yield reliable predictions that shape the way vast tracks of national forests are thinned — or selectively burned — to ward off disastrously hot conflagrations that can quickly overrun cities, sterilize soil and forever alter ecosystems.

"This actually is something that we're really trying to leverage to look for ways to deal with fire in the future," said Rod Linn, a senior lab scientist who leads efforts to create a supercomputing tool that predicts the outcome of fires in specific terrain and conditions.

The high stakes in the research are on prominent display during the furious start of spring wildfire season, which includes a blaze that has inched steadily toward Los Alamos National Laboratory, triggering preparations for a potential evacuation.

The lab emerged out of the World War II efforts to design nuclear weapons in Los Alamos under the Manhattan Project. It now conducts a range of national security work and research in diverse fields of renewable energy, nuclear fusion, space exploration, supercomputing and efforts to limit global threats from disease to cyberattacks. The lab is one of two U.S. sites gearing up to manufacture plutonium cores for use in nuclear weapons.

With nearly 1,000 firefighters battling the blaze, laboratory officials say critical infrastructure is well safeguarded from the fire, which spans 67 square miles.

Still, scientists are ready.

"We have our bags packed, cars loaded, kids are home from school — it's kind of a crazy day," said Adam Atchley, a father of two and laboratory hydrologist who studies wildfire ecology.

Wildfires that reach the Los Alamos National Laboratory increase the risk, however slightly, of discharging chemical waste and radionuclides such as plutonium through the air or in the ashes carried away by runoff after a fire.

Treasury: War bolsters need to combat illicit finance

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Treasury Department laid out recommendations Friday for tightening laws to guard against money laundering and illicit threats to the U.S. financial system, citing the conduct of Russians backing the invasion of Ukraine as evidence of how loopholes are being exploited.

Treasury's 32-page strategy document outlines recommendations to close loopholes in anti-money laundering laws, combat the use of real estate for money laundering schemes and enhance information-

sharing between the government and private sector financial firms.

"Illicit finance is a major national security threat and nowhere is that more apparent than in Russia's war against Ukraine, supported by decades of corruption by Russian elites," said Elizabeth Rosenberg, Treasury's assistant secretary for terrorist financing.

Sanctioned individuals and entities can remove identifying information from, or simply hide, their bank accounts, the department said. They can also use cryptocur-

rency to a limited degree or hide behind shell companies to evade financial sanctions.

"We need to close loopholes, work efficiently with international partners, and leverage new technologies to tackle the risks posed by corruption, an increase in domestic violent extremism and the abuse of virtual assets," Rosenberg said.

Every two years, Treasury releases a report with recommendations on how to close gaps that could facilitate terrorist and illicit finance.

Employers warned about AI hiring tools

Associated Press

The federal government said Thursday that artificial intelligence technology to screen new job candidates or monitor worker productivity can unfairly discriminate against people with disabilities, sending a warning to employers that the commonly used hiring tools could violate civil rights laws.

The U.S. Justice Department and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission jointly issued guidance to employers to take care before using popular algorithmic tools meant to streamline the work of evaluating employees and job prospects — but which could also potentially run afoul of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

“We are sounding an alarm regarding

the dangers tied to blind reliance on AI and other technologies that we are seeing increasingly used by employers,” Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke of the department’s Civil Rights Division told reporters Thursday. “The use of AI is compounding the long-standing discrimination that jobseekers with disabilities face.”

Among the examples given of popular work-related AI tools were resume scanners, employee monitoring software that ranks workers based on keystrokes, game-like online tests to assess job skills and video interviewing software that measures a person’s speech patterns or facial expressions.

Such technology could potentially screen out people with speech impediments, severe arthritis that slows typing or a range of other physical or mental impairments, the officials said.

Tools built to automatically analyze workplace behavior can also overlook on-the-job accommodations — such as a quiet workstation for someone with post-traumatic stress disorder or more frequent breaks for a pregnancy-related disability — that enable employees to modify their work conditions to perform their jobs successfully.

Experts have long warned that AI-based recruitment tools — while often pitched as a way of eliminating human bias — can actually entrench bias if they’re taking cues from industries where racial and gender disparities are already prevalent.

Dallas salon shooting may be hate crime

Associated Press

DALLAS — Dallas’ police chief said Friday that a shooting that injured three women in a hair salon in the city’s Koreatown might have been a hate crime as he announced that it could be connected to two other shootings at businesses run by Asian Americans.

Chief Eddie Garcia had previously said police didn’t have any indication the shooting Wednesday at Hair World Salon was motivated by hate, but he said that had changed as of Friday afternoon.

“The possibility that we are dealing with a violent gunman who is motivated by hate is

chilling and deeply disturbing,” Dallas Mayor Eric Johnson said in a statement Friday.

Authorities are still searching for a man dressed all in black who opened fire at the salon, then drove off in a maroon minivan. Garcia said investigators found that a similar vehicle was reported to be involved in two other recent shootings, including an April 2 drive-by in the area where the salon is located. No one was injured in either of those shootings.

“We are turning to every resident of the city of Dallas to keep an eye out and safeguard our city,” Garcia said. “Hate has no

place here.”

He said the vehicle was also linked to a drive-by shooting on Tuesday about 25 miles southeast of the shopping center where Wednesday’s shooting happened.

Garcia said police would be increasing patrols, and they were reaching out to other police departments in North Texas to see if there have been any similar incidents in their area. He said Dallas police have also reached out to the FBI to let them know of the possible connection.

The three women who were shot at the salon were taken to a hospital with injuries that weren’t life-threatening.

Texas ruling OKs investigations of parents of trans youth

Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — The Texas Supreme Court on Friday allowed the state to investigate parents of transgender youth for child abuse while also ruling in favor of one family that was among the first contacted by child welfare officials following an order by Republican Gov. Greg Abbott.

The court did not rule on the merits of the investigations — which were the first of its kind in the U.S. — only that lower courts in Texas overstepped by trying to block all cases from going forward.

The mixed ruling by Texas’ highest civil court, which is made up of nine elected Republican justices, comes at a moment when GOP lawmakers across the U.S. are accelerating ef-

orts to impose restrictions on transgender rights. Both parties in the lawsuit called the decision a victory.

Lambda Legal, which helped bring the lawsuit against Texas on behalf of the parents of the 16-year-old girl, called the decision a win because it put the state’s investigation into their family on hold. Although the ruling does not prevent Texas from launching investigations into other families, the state would be foolish to do so now because those families could also seek an injunction, said Omar Gonzalez-Pagan, counsel and health care strategist for Lambda Legal.

Texas went farther than any state in February when Abbott issued a first-of-its-kind order that instructed child welfare officials to in-

vestigate reports of gender-confirming care for kids as abuse.

A judge in Austin put that order on hold after a lawsuit brought on behalf of the 16-year-old girl whose family said the state was already investigating their family. It was filed by the American Civil Liberties Union and Lambda Legal.

The lawsuit marked the first report of parents being investigated following Abbott’s directive and an earlier nonbinding legal opinion by Republican Attorney General Ken Paxton labeling certain gender-confirming treatments as “child abuse.” The Texas Department of Family and Protective Service has said it opened nine investigations following the directive and opinion.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

'Bear Whisperer' charged in bear kill

AK ACHORAGE — A man who stars on a TV show called "The Bear Whisperer" has been accused of illegally killing a black bear in Alaska's Kenai Fjords National Park and lying about where it was killed.

The U.S. Attorney's Office filed misdemeanor charges against Harvey Neil Anthony of Maine and Nature Productions Inc. Anthony goes by the name of Blaine Anthony in the television series he also produces, the Anchorage Daily News reported.

Prosecutors alleged that Anthony and Nature Productions Inc. used footage from hunting trips in 2015 and 2017 in episodes of the show, "including footage of two black bear kills within the Kenai Fjords National Park."

The charges are related to a 2017 incident in which prosecutors allege Anthony shot and killed a black bear inside the park. The charging documents said he falsely reported where the bear was killed.

Police: Man dies after setting himself on fire

MO CHILLICOTHE — A man is dead after he doused himself with liquid and set himself on fire after being stopped by police for erratic driving, Chillicothe police said.

Police said in a news release a man was reported approaching businesses south of Chillicothe and asking for a lighter while carrying a container of flammable liquid.

The man was later seen driv-

ing erratically in Chillicothe, police said. When officers stopped him, the man poured the liquid on himself and ignited it, then ran toward the officers, who tried to put out the flames, according to the release.

The victim, a 43-year-old man from Dalton, was airlifted to a hospital, but died from his injuries.

Reckless driver said arrest on her bucket list

FL — A 19-year-old South Florida woman who fled from law enforcement in the Florida Keys told the deputy who caught up to her that getting arrested was on her "bucket list."

She was charged with fleeing and eluding, Monroe County Sheriff's officials said.

The deputy had spotted the woman driving recklessly. He turned on his lights and siren but the car did not immediately stop.

DA: Suspects kidnap baby after third attempt

CA SAN FRANCISCO — The man and the woman charged with kidnapping a 3-month-old baby last month from his Northern California home while his grandmother unloaded groceries tried at least three times to take the child before succeeding, authorities said.

Yesenia Ramirez, 43, and Jose Portillo, 28, were charged with the April 25 kidnapping of the boy who was taken from the family's second-floor San Jose apartment, prompting a frantic search by local and federal authorities. The child was found

unharmed in Portillo's home the following day and the two were arrested.

Ramirez and Portillo were charged with three attempted kidnapping counts at a hearing, Santa Clara County Deputy District Attorney Rebekah Wise said in a statement.

A motive for the kidnapping has not been determined but evidence shows that Ramirez and Portillo tried to abduct the child several times, including one when Portillo posed as a Child Protective Services worker and went to the family's home, Wise said.

Ramirez's attorney, Cody Salfer, said she was a friend of the family and had babysat the child several times.

2 plead guilty to role in nationwide phone scam

MA PITTSFIELD — Two men who participated in an elaborate phone scam that cheated people across the nation have agreed to repay their victims but avoided time behind bars, Massachusetts prosecutors said.

Ajaykumar Chaudhari, 26, of Pownal, Vt., and Jitendra Chaudhari, 29, of Williamstown, Mass., pleaded guilty in Berkshire Superior Court to larceny and attempt to commit larceny, according to the office of Berkshire District Attorney Andrea Harrington. They were arrested in June 2020.

They, together with a third defendant, have agreed to pay more than \$200,000 in restitution.

That third defendant pleaded guilty to the same charges in December and was sentenced to time served.

The three men, sometimes posing as government employees, targeted about 20 victims, some of whom sent packages of cash, often to an address in Adams, Mass., prosecutors said.

In one case, they told the victim their Social Security number had been compromised and they needed to send money to fix the problem, according to the DA's office. Victims came from multiple states including California, Missouri, Ohio and Virginia, prosecutors said.

State to start offering kids teledental services

ME HALLOWELL — Maine is now home to a network of virtual dental services that supporters said would make dental care more readily available to children.

The practices are "virtual dental homes" in which children become patients with a dental practice but receive care in school and primary care settings, said Democratic Rep. Chellie Pingree, a supporter of the method. Services are delivered using telehealth technology, she said.

Dentists are then able to complete the exam and create a treatment plan if necessary. Pingree said the model will remove barriers to dental care in Maine, which she said has a high number of children who don't receive preventative dental care.

Pingree secured \$650,000 in federal funding to facilitate the launch of the program. She said she is working with the Children's Oral Health Network of Maine on the effort.

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Warriors oust Grizzlies in six games

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Stephen Curry, Klay Thompson and Draymond Green are cherishing this playoff run a little more given they spent the past two years watching the post-season instead of their familiar position chasing championships.

Now, with those experienced faces and a cast of new stars, the Golden State Warriors are headed to another Western Conference finals and need just four wins to give themselves a title chance again.

They will lean on the experience of Curry, Green, Thompson and Kevon Looney having been here so many times already.

“It’s unbelievable knowing what we’ve been through these last two years and six of the last eight we have an opportunity to play for the Finals,” said Curry, who took his team to five straight Finals from 2015-19. “I think me, Draymond, Klay, Loon, we’ve been in this position before. We understand the emotions, the adrenaline, how much you want it, how hard it

is. ... Never take it for granted and understand this is what it’s all about, and then for us to have another opportunity to get four more wins and play for a trophy, that’s special.”

For Thompson, it means so much given he returned in January from more than 2½ years spent recovering from surgeries on his left knee and right Achilles tendon.

Golden State grabbed 70 rebounds — 22 by Looney after Curry and Green pushed for him to be a starter again — on the way to eliminating the Memphis Grizzlies 110-86 on Friday night and now advances to face either the Suns or Mavericks in a best-of-seven battle for the West. Game 7 of that series is Sunday in Phoenix to determine who’s next for the Warriors.

Thompson scored 30 points with eight three-pointers in adding another Game 6 masterpiece to his long list of them.

“I have no idea. I have no clue,” he said, “I love the moments. I love the pressure. I love playing basketball at the highest level.”

Fresh faces like Andrew Wiggins and Jordan Poole are playing huge roles during this postseason run. Golden State suddenly also has a raucous home crowd at Chase Center, where the Warriors are 6-0 so far these playoffs.

And it feels a little like old Oracle Arena these days.

“I think these fans knew what we were up against,” Green said. “We’ve all talked about the home-court advantage and how this isn’t Oracle and you have to reestablish that home court, and I think we are doing a good job of it. But our fans were absolutely incredible tonight. It took everything we had to win that game, including the fan support and the noise that was in the arena.”

This time, the Splash Brothers Curry and Thompson could let loose on their own floor, as their own fans chanted “Whoop that trick.”

They loved every second of that. Golden State is going on and the Grizzlies are going home to Memphis for good.

The Warriors have certainly endured their share of drama

and unforeseen stress to get this far.

Golden State contended with two-time reigning MVP Nikola Jokic over a five-game first-round series with the Nuggets, then got past Ja Morant and Memphis in a series full of back-and-forth chatter between the rivals. The Grizzlies eliminated the Warriors in a play-in game last season.

First, Gary Payton II went down for the rest of the post-season with a fractured left elbow on a hard foul by Dillon Brooks that led to the Memphis star’s one-game suspension for the Flagrant 2 committed when he pounded Payton over the head as he drove for a layup in Game 2.

Morant got hurt in Game 3 and accused Poole of reinjuring his troublesome right knee by pulling on it as they fought for a loose ball.

Coach Steve Kerr caught COVID-19 and sat out Games 4, 5 and 6 with Mike Brown the acting head coach of two teams at once given he had just been named the new Sacramento Kings’ choice last Sunday.

Tatum’s huge effort helps Celtics force seventh game

Associated Press

MILWAUKEE — Jayson Tatum wouldn’t let it happen again.

With the defending champion Milwaukee Bucks attempting to complete a fourth-quarter comeback for the second straight game and close out their Eastern Conference semifinal, Tatum made sure the Boston Celtics instead kept their season alive and forced a decisive seventh game.

Tatum scored 46 points and the Celtics withstood a brilliant performance from the Bucks’ Giannis Antetokounmpo to win 108-95 on Friday night, the third straight victory for a road team in this thrilling series.

“I wasn’t going to leave anything out there and have any regrets,” Tatum said. “Just trying to do what it took.”

After Milwaukee reduced a 14-point deficit to four with just under 9 minutes left, Tatum took over the game. He scored 16 of Boston’s 26 fourth-quarter points.

“He was unbelievable,” said Antetokounmpo, who was pretty extraordinary in his own right with 44 points, 20 rebounds and six assists.

Tatum’s effort set up a winner-take-all matchup Sunday on the Celtics’ home court. The victor heads to Miami to begin an East finals matchup with the

top-seeded Heat on Tuesday.

“I don’t think anybody’s won two games in a row in this series,” Bucks coach Mike Budenholzer said. “Now, it’s the finality. You’ve got to go and find a way to get that fourth win and win the series. I think everybody in sport looks for that game. That college feel. That NCAA feel, where if you lose your season’s done, if you win, you keep going. It’s exciting.”

Milwaukee had won all eight of its potential series clinchers in Budenholzer’s four-year tenure before Friday. This marked the first time the Bucks had lost a possible clincher since a Game 7 defeat at Boston in a 2018 first-

round series.

The Celtics showed their grit by bouncing back two nights after blowing a 14-point, fourth-quarter lead in a 110-107 Game 5 home loss. Milwaukee tried to rally again after trailing by 14 in the final period, but Boston stayed in front.

“Tonight will be the first night since that game that I’ll get some sleep,” said Marcus Smart, who had 21 points, seven assists and no turnovers.

Jaylen Brown added 22 points for the Celtics, who capitalized on their superiority from three-point range. Boston was 17-for-43 and the Bucks 7-for-27 from beyond the arc.

Panthers find mojo to beat Caps, advance

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — When the Florida Panthers faced their first real adversity of the season trailing their playoff series against the Washington Capitals, players held a meeting to set things straight.

They talked about what they needed to do better and got on the same page.

“After that, we just started playing the right way,” captain Aleksander Barkov said. “We held each other accountable, worked really hard for each other and for the guy next to you. That’s how you win.”

The Panthers won the franchise’s first playoff series since 1996 by relying on a familiar recipe from the regular season, when they were the NHL’s best team and led the league with 29 comeback victories. Each of their final three wins against Washington were in come-from-behind fashion, once erasing a three-goal deficit and twice getting some overtime heroics from Carter Verhaeghe. On Friday, they advanced with a 4-3 overtime win.

Initial nerves at home early

in the series faded when Florida started to feel the pressure. Then the Panthers started to look and play like themselves and moved on to face the winner of the series between the back-to-back Stanley Cup champion Tampa Bay Lightning and Toronto Maple Leafs.

“As the series went on, I felt they loosened up a little bit,” interim coach Andrew Brunette said. “They found their mojo and got going.”

That mojo provided the confidence the team needed to withstand a tying goal by the Capitals’ T.J. Oshie with 1:03 left in Game 6 and a series-long 0-for-18 drought on the power play. Florida joined only a handful of teams in NHL playoff history to win a best-of-seven series without scoring a power-play goal but could still get a chuckle out of it in the aftermath of an emotional victory.

“We just got to stick with it and, obviously, maybe work on our power play because we haven’t scored a goal,” top winger Jonathan Huberdeau said.

No team scored as many goals as the Panthers during

the regular season — a rate of 4.11 a game not seen since Mario Lemieux’s Pittsburgh Penguins. Florida didn’t have a team yet at that point.

Success came early in the organization’s existence with a trip to the Cup Final in its third season. After the Panthers were swept by the Colorado Avalanche, they hadn’t won a playoff series since and the reputation of losing in the first round latched on to the franchise and, particularly, cornerstone players Barkov, Huberdeau and defenseman Aaron Ekblad.

Verhaeghe was the team’s leading scorer with 12 points on six goals and six assists, but Florida’s core players were a big part of moving on and got a chance to soak it all in.

“We’re all happy and (it is) a big relief for us,” Huberdeau said. “Having this feeling, we didn’t know how it felt. The last time I felt that was junior. It’s just good to have that feeling again about winning a series, and now we just go to work and think about second round and, who knows, win this one as well.”

Newcomers played a major role, too. Trade-deadline acquisition Claude Giroux scored in the third period of Game 6 and set up Verhaeghe for the overtime winner, which was some level of redemption for the longtime Philadelphia Flyers captain after losing a key face-off late in regulation when Washington tied it.

Even amid their power-play struggles, the Panthers showed they could score at 5-on-5 and got solid goaltending from Sergei Bobrovsky to keep playoff hockey going in South Florida. Even though his team had made good on the “Comeback Cats” nickname again, Brunette saw the series as more of what Florida did well all year.

“I see a group of guys that get hit and they don’t fall down and then they start hitting back,” he said. “To give up a late goal, those are heartbreaking moments. They could really affect you, it could kill momentum, it could do a bunch of things and again we took the punch, we stood up and then we started punching back. That epitomizes what the whole season was.”

Rangers defeat Penguins, force deciding Game 7

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Chris Kreider’s long slap shot bounced over Louis Domingue and into the net with 1:28 left and the New York Rangers beat the Pittsburgh Penguins 5-3 on Friday night to push their thrilling first-round series to a deciding Game 7.

Kreider’s second of the game and fourth of the playoffs sent the series back to New York. The Rangers’ Andrew Copp added an empty netter for good measure in the waning seconds. Game 7 is Sunday at Madison Square Garden.

“Regardless of the situation, I’m proud of the way this team

competes,” Kreider said. “Whether we’re down, whether we’re up, we’re trying to get to our game, trying to play the same way.”

Mike Zibanejad had two goals and two assists and Adam Fox had four assists. Igor Shesterkin stopped 31 shots to win at PPG Paints Arena for the first time this series after getting chased by Pittsburgh in Games 3 and 4.

Bryan Rust, Evgeni Malkin and Jeff Carter scored for the Penguins. Domingue, who has become a local folk hero while filling in for injured Tristan Jarry and Casey DeSmith, made 33 saves but couldn’t get a handle on Kreider’s shot, which seemed

to hit him high then popped up into the air and behind him before rolling into the net.

Stars 4, Flames 2: Miro Heiskanen scored the go-ahead goal late in the second period and host Dallas recovered after blowing an early two-goal lead to force a deciding Game 7 in its first-round Western Conference series.

Roope Hintz and Michael Raffl also scored for the wildcard Stars, and Tyler Seguin added an empty-netter in the final minute. Jake Oettinger stopped 36 shots.

“The message was we’ve got to have a good third. We haven’t always had good thirds at times

with the lead, and we wanted to kind of try to turn that,” Dallas center Joe Pavelski said. “The other night, they came out hard in the third and we didn’t handle it well enough. And tonight was one of those situations where I think everyone bought in. We took a step in the right direction of doing it.”

Mikael Backlund and Michael Stone scored for the Flames, who tied the score 2-2 with 8:01 left in the second. Jacob Markstrom also had 36 saves.

The series wraps up Sunday night in Calgary, where the Flames last hosted a Game 7 in 2006 and lost their first-round series to Anaheim.

Astros rout Nats for 11th straight win

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Jose Altuve homered on the first pitch of the game, Yordan Alvarez and Yuli Gurriel also went deep and the Houston Astros extended their winning streak to 11 games with a 6-1 rout of the Washington Nationals on Friday night.

Houston manager Dusty Baker, who led Washington to consecutive NL East titles in 2016 and '17, won in his first game back at Nationals Park since he was fired after two seasons.

Framber Valdez (2-2) allowed one run over 7½ innings for his first victory since April 7. The Astros have allowed just 12 runs during its streak with an 0.91 ERA in that stretch.

The Nationals have lost seven of their last nine and are 4-14 at home. Their 11-23 record after 34 games is their worst since opening 9-25 in 2007.

Valdez struck out six during his longest outing of the year, yielding his only run on Alcides Escobar's fielder's choice grounder in the seventh.

Josiah Gray (4-3) allowed six runs and six hits in six innings.

Yankees 10, White Sox 4: Giancarlo Stanton homered in his third consecutive game, Aaron Judge went deep for the second time in two nights and New York romped at Chicago.

After connecting twice and driving in a career-high six runs Thursday in a 15-7 win, Stanton smacked a two-run drive Friday in the first inning against Vince Velasquez

(2-3). The Yankees have won 19 of 22 games.

Judge made it 6-0 when he hit a solo drive in the fourth for his major league-leading 12th home run. Josh Donaldson also homered in his second straight game and drove in three runs, and Joey Gallo went deep, too.

Gerrit Cole (3-0) lasted 6 1/3 innings, allowing three runs and six hits. The right-hander struck out nine and walked one, helping New York improve to a major league-best 24-8.

Angels 2, Athletics 0: Chase Silseth allowed one hit in six strong innings while becoming the first player from last year's draft to make his major league debut, leading Los Angeles to a win at Oakland.

An 11th-round draft pick by the Angels last July, Silseth was still pitching in college for Arizona a year ago.

Mariners 2, Mets 1: Ty France hit a tie-breaking single in the eighth inning for yet another key hit and his team broke through against New York's bullpen after Max Scherzer tired Seattle's first game at Citi Field.

Red Sox 7, Rangers 1: Nick Pivetta allowed a run and three hits in a season-long seven innings to win for the first time since August and Boston had a four-run sixth inning to win at Texas.

Reds 8, Pirates 2: Mike Moustakas homered twice and Brandon Drury drove in four runs to break out of a slump and lead resurgent Cincinnati past host Pittsburgh.

Twins 12, Indians 8: Royce Lewis hit a grand slam for his first big league homer,

capping a nine-run fifth inning that sent host Minnesota past coronavirus-struck Cleveland.

Brewers 2, Marlins 1: Jace Peterson walked against Anthony Bender with the bases loaded in the ninth inning to lift Milwaukee to a win at Miami.

Tigers 4, Orioles 2: Miguel Cabrera doubled and homered to help slumping Detroit beat visiting Baltimore.

Diamondbacks 4, Cubs 3: Ketel Marte had three hits and drove in a run, Zach Davies pitched effectively into the sixth inning and host Arizona beat Chicago.

Giants 8, Cardinals 2: Logan Webb pitched six strong innings and San Francisco won at St. Louis for its sixth straight victory.

Rays 5, Blue Jays 2: Brandon Lowe hit a pair of triples and Manuel Margot had a tie-breaking single in the eighth inning, leading Tampa Bay past visiting Toronto.

Padres 11, Braves 6: Ha-Seong Kim hit a three-run homer in the seventh inning off reliever Will Smith, Wil Myers went deep in the sixth against Max Fried and San Diego won at Atlanta.

Royals 14, Rockies 10: Andrew Benintendi hit a two-run homer and an RBI triple, Hunter Dozier had his first career five-hit game and Kansas City won at Colorado.

Phillies 12, Dodgers 10(10): Nick Castellanos had a two-run double during his team's three-run 10th, and visiting Philadelphia battered the slumping Los Angeles pitching staff for the second straight game.

Source: Bauer's suspension appeal to begin May 23

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Trevor Bauer's arbitration appeal of his unprecedented two-year suspension under Major League Baseball's domestic violence policy has been scheduled to start May 23, a person familiar with the hearing told The Associated Press.

The person spoke Friday on condition of anonymity because the date was not announced.

The appeal will be heard by a three-person panel chaired by independent arbitrator Martin Scheinman. It will include one representative each from MLB

and the players' association.

Bauer was suspended by Commissioner Rob Manfred on April 29, a penalty that if unchanged will cost the Los Angeles Dodgers pitcher just over \$60 million of his \$102 million, three-year contract. Bauer immediately said he would challenge it.

A San Diego woman, whom the pitcher had met through social media, has alleged Bauer beat and sexually abused her last year. She later sought but was denied a restraining order. Los Angeles prosecutors said in February there was insufficient evidence to prove the woman's ac-

cusations beyond a reasonable doubt.

Bauer, who hasn't played since the allegations surfaced last summer and MLB began investigating, repeatedly has said that everything that happened between the two was consensual.

Bauer also has sued the woman in federal court.

The lawsuit said "the damage to Mr. Bauer has been extreme" after the woman alleged that he choked her into unconsciousness, punched her repeatedly and had anal sex with her without her consent during two sexual encounters last year.

The pitcher has said the two engaged in rough sex at his Pasadena home at her suggestion and followed guidelines they agreed to in advance.

Two women from Ohio also have accused him of sexual misconduct.

Bauer's representatives have said the first Ohio woman's allegation is "categorically false." Bauer has said he had a "casual and wholly consensual sexual relationship from 2013-2018" with the other Ohio woman and that none of their encounters "ever involved a single non-consensual, let alone illegal, act."